

## Department of General Services

707 3RD STREET  
WEST SACRAMENTO, CA 95605



**Date:** October 13, 2021

**To:** Responsible Agencies, Interested Parties and Organizations

**Subject:** Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project and Scheduling of a Scoping Meeting at 5:00 p.m. on October 27, 2021

**Project Title:** CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project

**Location:** Santa Cruz County, California

The State of California Department of General Services (DGS), on behalf of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), is preparing a focused Environmental Impact Report (EIR), consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), to determine any potentially significant adverse environmental impacts resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project. An Initial Study identified three topics with the potential for a significant impact: Aesthetics; Biological Resources, and Land Use and Planning.

In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, this Notice of Preparation (NOP) will be circulated to the public and responsible agencies for input regarding the analysis in the EIR. The State requests your input regarding the scope and content of the environmental analysis, including the significant environmental issues, reasonable range of alternatives, and mitigation measures to include in the EIR. Details regarding the project description appear in the attached NOP.

**Virtual Meeting Information:**

**Wednesday, October 27, 2021**

Beginning at **5:00 p.m.**

**Remote Attendance Only**

Via Zoom at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81145072842>

or by Phone: (669) 900-6833, then enter Meeting ID: 811 4507 2842

**Written comments must be received or postmarked by November 12, 2021.**

Please mail or email your comments to:

Terry Ash, Senior Environmental Planner  
c/o Aspen Environmental Group  
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 640  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
[chalkmountaintower@aspeneq.com](mailto:chalkmountaintower@aspeneq.com)

# Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report

## 1. Project Title

CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project

## 2. Lead Agency Name and Address

Department of General Services  
707 3rd Street  
West Sacramento, CA 95605

## 3. Contact Person and Phone Number

Terry Ash, Senior Environmental Planner  
Department of General Services/Real Estate Services Division  
Project Management & Development Branch  
(916) 201-0085  
[Terry.Ash@dgs.ca.gov](mailto:Terry.Ash@dgs.ca.gov)

## 4. Project Location

The proposed CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain site is an existing communications site located on Big Basin Redwood State Park in the Santa Cruz Mountains in northwestern Santa Cruz County. San Mateo County is to the north, with a portion of the county extending south along Highway 1 approximately 0.5 miles west of the site. The site is approximately 20 miles northwest of the City of Santa Cruz, 11 miles northwest of Davenport, and 8 miles south of Pescadero (see Figure 1 at the end of this NOP).

## 5. Project Sponsor's Name and Address

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, CAL FIRE  
1131 S Street  
Sacramento, CA 95811

## 6. Description of Project

Consistent with the CEQA, the State is preparing an EIR to determine any potentially significant adverse environmental impacts resulting from the construction and operation of the proposed CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project (Project). CAL FIRE operates and manages communications equipment at 192 telecommunications sites throughout California, including at the existing Chalk Mountain site. CAL FIRE proposes to construct and operate the Chalk Mountain Communications Tower and Facilities Replacement Project (proposed Project or Project), which would install an up to 80-foot-tall telecommunications tower with Mimomax technology equipment, very high frequency (VHF) antennas, and supporting facilities at the existing CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain communications facility. The new tower and facilities would replace existing facilities and would support new microwave technology. CAL FIRE would remove existing outdated supporting facilities, as well as a 35-foot-tall emergency repeater that was temporarily installed when the existing 60-foot wood pole burned in the CZU August Lightning Complex fire.

In addition to the tower, the new facilities include a secure climate-controlled equipment building, solar panels, and a propane fuel tank. The tower and associated building would host very high frequency (VHF) antennas and Mimomax technology equipment. The proposed Project is needed to support microwave-

based communications between other CAL FIRE communications sites and field personnel and would be available to support communications needs of other public safety agencies.

A more detailed project description is included in an Initial Study that is posted on the Project website at: <http://www.aspeneg.com/cal-fire-chalk-mountain-project/>.

## 7. Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

This NOP is a required publication at the outset of the EIR process. The EIR will provide an environmental assessment of the potential consequences of the proposed Project. It will discuss how the construction and operation of the proposed Project could potentially affect the environment, identify any significant impacts, and recommend measures to mitigate those impacts. The EIR will also consider the potential environmental impacts of alternatives and identify an environmentally superior alternative.

The No Project Alternative will evaluate the impacts resulting from continued operation of the existing, outdated communications facilities at the CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain site. As appropriate, a reasonable range of other alternatives that would avoid or lessen significant environmental effects related to the proposed Project will be discussed. Specific alternatives for the proposed Project have not yet been determined; we are soliciting your comments to help identify alternatives.

## 8. Surrounding Land Uses and Setting

The CAL FIRE Chalk Mountain project site is located in the Santa Cruz Mountains on an open, bare ridge that supports existing telecommunications facilities, approximately 0.75 miles west of the actual Chalk Mountain and approximately 3 miles east of the Pacific Ocean. The proposed Project would be on State land within the Big Basin Redwood State Park and within the designated Coastal Zone in Santa Cruz County.

## 9. Other Public Agencies Whose Approval Is Required

Table 1 lists the permits and approvals which may be required for Project-related activities. All necessary permits/approvals would be obtained prior to construction to ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and requirements throughout Project implementation.

**Table 1. Permits and Approvals Which May Be Required**

Agency/Department	Permit/Approval	Description
<b>Federal</b>		
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)	Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit	Protects Waters of the U.S., including tributaries and riparian areas.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	Federal Endangered Species Act	Required if a project would result in take of a federally listed species.
<b>State of California</b>		
Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)	NPDES Permit for construction dewatering	RWQCB approval is needed for general construction runoff and/or construction dewatering discharges under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).
	General Construction Permit and Clean Water Act Section 401 Permit	Project proponents are required to submit a Notice of Intent to the RWQCB for coverage under the General Construction Permit if project disturbance would be over 1 acre. Section 401 permits are necessary when Section 404 permits are required.

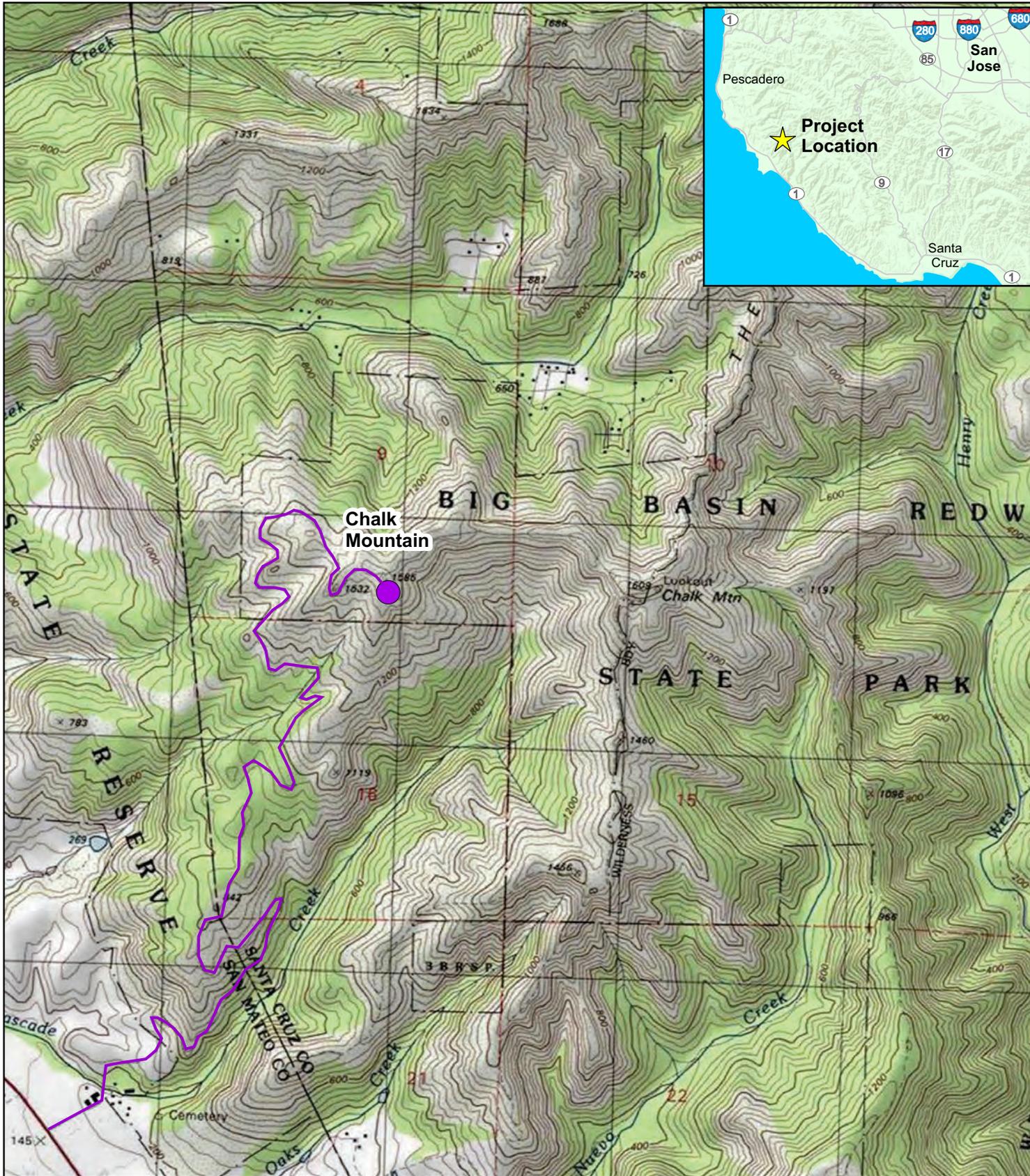
**Table 1. Permits and Approvals Which May Be Required**

Agency/Department	Permit/Approval	Description
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	California Endangered Species Act Incidental Take Authorization	Required if a project would result in take of a State-listed species.
	Streambed Alteration Agreement	Requires CDFW to review project impacts to “waters of the state” (bed, banks, channel, or associated riparian areas of a river, stream, or lake), including impacts to wildlife and vegetation from sediments, diversions, and other disturbances.
<b>Regional</b>		
Santa Cruz County	Coastal Zone Permit (Level 5 development permit)	Required for land development within the Coastal Zone under the California Coastal Act of 1976.
California Air Resources Board (CARB) or Air Quality Management District (AQMD)	Portable Equipment Registration or Air Quality Permit to Operate	Portable equipment subject to local air quality permitting requirements, such as generators or air compressors, must either be registered under the CARB Portable Equipment Registration Program (PERP) or obtain a local air quality permit to operate.
Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution District (MBUAPCD)	Authority to Construct and Permit to Operate	Required if the internal combustion engine for the emergency backup generator is rated at 50 brake-horsepower or greater.

## 10. Potential Environmental Impacts to Be Considered

The Initial Study found that the proposed Project could potentially have significant impacts in the following issue areas: Aesthetics, Biological Resources, and Land Use and Planning, and these potential impacts will be evaluated further in the EIR. For all other impacts, the proposed Project’s potential effects were determined to be either less than significant or no impact would result. The Initial Study is posted on the Project website at: <http://www.aspeneg.com/cal-fire-chalk-mountain-project/>

Pursuant to Section 15123(b)(2) of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR shall identify areas of controversy known to the lead agency including issues raised by agencies and the public. This NOP will be distributed for a 30-day public review and comment period. Public comments may reflect concern and/or controversy over other environmental issues in addition to the potential environmental effects listed above.



- Legend**
- Project Site Location
  - ~ Coastal Access Road



**Figure 1**  
**Project Location**